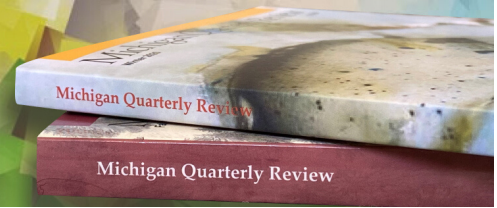


Lifting the Page

Resources for Teaching Writing

 Michigan Quarterly Review



Voyage Making

What Does Europe Want Now? Vol. 58, No. 4, Fall 2019 Issue

When I say

these words, I don't know what they mean. I only know
what I imagine they mean. I imagine
a castle made of bones, I imagine a large pointer
bounding through a bustling market, I imagine
that you are my ancient ancestor.

–Marianne Chan (554)

Created for MQR by Carlina Duan

signs of an underwater life
like that told of in the ancestors' tales
where someone enters the sea and never comes
back either dead or alive

–Daniela Danz (633)

Contextual Note for Teachers: If you find yourself in a classroom, or able to access a class-based setting: The following two poems are found in MQR's What Does Europe Want Now? issue. These poems can be taught in a social studies, literature, or sociology-based class. In his introduction, guest editor Benjamin Paloff writes: "Writers, including those of a more traditionalist, localist, or even reactionary bent, are internationalists by default, in constant collaboration with interlocutors far distant or long dead." This lesson plan asks students to think of creating dialogue with geographically-, spiritually-, or emotionally-distant interlocutors. This dialogue might be especially present in our current moment, amidst a global pandemic that has forced us, in a sense, to be creative interlocutors with digital space(s) beyond that of our own homes. As international readers, how can we sustain conversations with place that occur beyond the page, or even beyond our physical and personal domains?

Fortress

Daniela Danz

1

flashes on the shore an odorless sea
the ones who were caught huddle
on the Estrada and fix their eyes on
crushed shells the indifferent beach
and the cameras stay trained on them
until one man sends his face
up to the front line while far back
behind his rapid thoughts something
slows and falls by the wayside –
an altogether too sentimental relic to
leave quite intolerable to the locals

2

when the boat drifted through the night
they saw monstrous illuminated
shapes beneath them and the
expressionless eyes of the mackerels
signs of an underwater life
like that told of in the ancestors' tales
where someone enters the sea and never comes
back either dead or alive

3

in the Musée du Louvre an old woman stands
deep in thought before the raft of Medusa
and cannot describe the impression
it makes on her

4

we also traveled there our small family
and bathed in the sea

Translated from the German
by Monika Cassel

Daniela Danz: Pontus. Gedichte ©Wallstein Verlag, Göttingen 2009. Daniela Danz: V. Gedichte © Wallstein Verlag, Göttingen 2014.

Love Song for Antonio Pigafetta, Ferdinand Magellan's Chronicler

Marianne Chan

"the longest and most valuable narrative of the voyage was written by a young Italian who was neither a professional seaman nor a humanist."

—R. A. Skelton, Introduction to Magellan's Voyage: A Narrative Account of the First Circumnavigation

I consider you a forefather, Tony, even though you were
from Venice, and your beard held the aroma
of gondolas passing through a canal. Still, I tell people

you were my great, great grandfather's grandfather.
I always wanted to be Italian. When we lived in Europe,
my dad would toss our sleeping bodies in the back seat

of a Honda Accord in the dead of night to drive
the 600 kilometers to Vicenza and buy porcelain figurines
from a man named Guillermo. We'd sell them

to the Filipino ladies in Germany who wanted to decorate
their military base apartments like palazzos. Tony, did you
grow up in a palazzo or a basilica? When I say

these words, I don't know what they mean. I only know
what I imagine they mean. I imagine
a castle made of bones, I imagine a large pointer

bounding through a bustling market, I imagine
that you are my ancient ancestor. And you
very well may be. In your journal, you wrote

that you danced with unshod princesses from Zzubu.

My Zzubuano mother is not from royal blood, but she is
the daughter of a woman who stuffed adobo pork

in her apron pockets to save for later. I do always go
unshod, though I don't wear linen made from trees
to cover my shameful parts. I would

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if that interested you. I would wear my hair long
so the ends touch the ground. You were a tourist, Tony,
and now so are we. In Italy, we bought seeds and fed

the pigeons on the cobblestones, and my father would say
about the locals: "Their manner of drinking is this . . ."
and "Their manner of dressing is that . . ."

On our drive home, we exchanged porcelain for a bowl
of hot German soup, and I would sit on my feet
and write, like you did, about our voyages. In my journal,

I wrote "ciao = hello & goodbye." This
is a circular word, used in meeting and parting,
going all the way around, like the heads of island

warriors, like the rings they wore in their ears,
like a fleet of Christian ships sailing the heathen waters.



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Entering the Poems:

1. READ. I love entering poems by giving them voice – reading them multiple times. First, to myself, silently and on the page. Next, out loud. Sometimes, I even record myself reading a poem – then play it back, paying attention to what I hear, and what I see.

In reading these poems, experiment! Read once, read multiple times. Be a witness to your own curiosity. Jot down notes on what excites you, or stumps you.

As you read, highlight or underline the moments that stick with you – your personal “heat points” of the poem(s). These could be moments where your tongue trips, your heart thumps, a moment you’re puzzled by, or want to spend longer with. Pay attention to what/where these moment(s) are. Ask yourself questions: Where’s the stories in these poems? Who’s speaking? (Who’s not speaking?) What’s conjured? How do these poems invite comfort and/or discomfort?

2. DRAW. Inspired by illustrator Carson Ellis’s [Quarantine Art Club](#), start off by writing VOYAGE at the top of your page.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines “voyage” as a long journey involving travel by sea or space. In thinking of VOYAGE, what comes to mind? Who – or what – or where -- do you imagine? Draw a VOYAGE – whatever this word might conjure for you.

As you draw, think about the role of time. Are you drawing the middle of [a voyage]? At the end of one? Who’s on the voyage? What surrounds the voyage? What’s necessary in order to survive the voyage, or leave the voyage?

Note: “Entering the Poems” is scaffolded for at-home learning, but could be used for collective and in-person learning settings, too.

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3. REFLECT & FREE-WRITE. Before moving to Discussion, think of a specific place in your personal or familial life right now. Write this place down. (Perhaps this place is imagined, or inherited.) Does place manifest as a creaky bicycle? A windowsill lined with old stones? A cabin by a tiny creek, preserved in family lore? A “back seat // of a Honda Accord in the dead of night to drive / the 600 kilometers to Vicenza and buy porcelain figurines / from a man named Guillermo,” as Marianne Chan conjures? Be specific. Once you’ve written this place down, free-write (write without stopping, with free reins!) in response to these questions: How can place become an a part of a greater conversation of, for example, your familial line? Of your understanding of geography? Of your sense of home?

Discuss:

1. What is a voyage? Think back to your original drawing. How do these poems either affirm or disrupt your initial ideas of voyage? How do these poems expand or trouble your ideas of geographical voyage? Of personal voyage?

2. Imagination of “ancestry” plays a large part in both poems, working to form and challenge ideas of inheritance and lineage. How do both poets grapple with knowledge passed down to them through geographical place? How does place – and its continuous/simultaneous evolution – inform each of the poems?

These questions are invitations to engage with these poems either on your own, or in a collective group setting. If you are moving solo through these questions, consider writing down your ideas in a notebook, or recording yourself thinking out loud.

Create:

Think of a specific place you’ve encountered (or re-encountered) recently. List five objects from that place. Now, imagine you are a descendent from one of these objects. What is this object’s history? What stories will you inherit? What piece(s) will you pass on? How would you describe your own voyage to arriving at this place/object? Feel free to take this prompt and translate it to any creative genre: a poem, an essay, a poem-video, a collage, a visual object.

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